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the magazine of the Royal Ontario Museum

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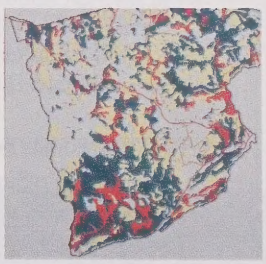

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Editor's Note

Is there anything more distressing to the senses, short of pain, than a foul odour? The plethora of modern room and personal deodorizers seem to indicate that a continual offensive must be waged against strong, uninvited scents. And society intensifies the battle when bad smells are associated with threats to health and even life. For this reason smokers have become pariahs in many societies and laws have been passed to define where smoking is permissible.

A similar situation existed in England, albeit on a far greater and more serious scale, as a result of the Industrial Revolution, beginning in the late 18th century. Intolerable odours caused by unmanageable amounts of garbage and human waste were accompanied by the cholera epidemics that ravaged London in 1832 and 1848. Public works projects to bring the situation under control began in the 1850s throughout England's overcrowded urban centres. However, the association of odour with disease in the minds of the middle class led to their burning of aromatic pastilles for protection, as well as to the creation of a very distinct form of pastille burner. One of these burners is pictured on the cover. In his story, Conrad Biernacki describes the evolution of these ceramics, which look so eccentric today.

It is always important to understand the broad effects of any action or potential action. Today city planners are consulted to avoid the very problems that rapid urban growth brought to England and other industrialized nations. Similar planning and management skills are beginning to be applied to biodiversity research on the world's natural habitats. In their article, David Barr and William Michael Carter describe geographic information systems, computer maps of a given area that can be superimposed to show the overall effects of any changes to specific conditions or resources. Museum natural history collections are playing an important role as sources of data for this new technology.

Far removed from the concerns of Victorian England and high-tech planning, Mima Kapches's research in some Metropolitan Toronto backyards may have unearthed an ancient site of Iroquoian ceramic manufacture, the first such site to be found. The techniques for the manufacture of Iroquoian ceramics were never documented, although ceramics were for centuries an important part of the Iroquois' material culture. With the introduction of European metalware their traditional clay vessels were rapidly abandoned. Archaeologists, in association with anthropologists and modern ceramicists, are now trying to learn more about this once-important domestic skill.

Another domestic product that has been overlooked is the everyday cotton blue-and-white embroidered textiles from rural southwestern China. Catherine Pagani explains that the centuries-old folk tradition has been missed by scholars while attention has focused on exquisite embroidered silks. However, the pictorial cottons are the language through which researchers can learn the cultural history of China's largely illiterate, minority rural populations who have been as overlooked as their textiles.

As we enter the holiday season, I hope that you will be greeted by only the sweetest of odours, and that you enjoy this issue of *Rotunda*.

Sandra Shaul

SANDRA SHAUL

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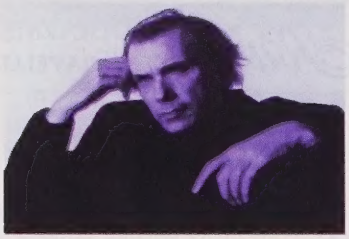

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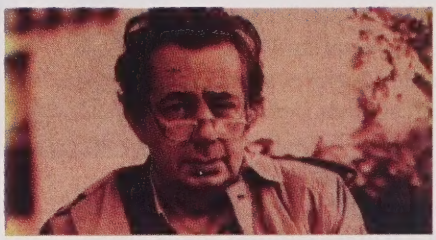

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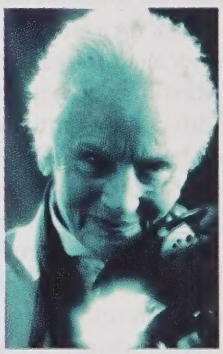

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A spoonful of high quality caviar will send those who love this delicacy into ecstasy.

Caviar

PURISTS WILL TELL YOU THAT CAVIAR must come from sturgeon, a prehistoric fish, and that sturgeon must come from the Caspian, and that is that. It is also unbridled flummery.

Sturgeon caviar was on a par with peanuts in the last century. There was French caviar from the Garonne, Italian caviar from the Po, and American caviar from the Hudson River, where sturgeon was so plentiful, it was pawned off as "Albany beef" and its roe dished out freely in American saloons to encourage beer-swilling. That was before we did to the sturgeon what we have just done to the Atlantic cod.

Although it had long been appreciated in the courts of the Czars, Caspian caviar arrived in France only in 1920, as part of the baggage of exiled Russian princes. It made its public debut at the Universal Exhibition of 1925 and was quickly embraced, along with foie gras and truffles, as a pillar of *gastronomie.* France remains the world's single largest consumer, accounting for 65 tonnes a year.

Price is the magic ingredient in caviar's spell. At the turn of the century, the common Sevruga caviar was the most popular in Russia. The Czars, preferring to enshrine the huge, egg-filled Beluga (10 per cent of 800 kilograms is a lot of caviar) in the gastronomic pantheon, simply tripled its price. Demand more than tripled, and Beluga remains the prince of caviars to this day.

The Caviar Centre in Toronto is Canada's largest importer, distributing exclusively the elite products of the Geneva-based Caviar House. Director Mark Omidi will sell you a 250-gram tin of rare pearl-white caviar for a mere US$5000. This caviar, called Almas, is taken from the belly of a sturgeon at least 120 years old. The "tin" is made of 24-karat gold. It comes in a walnut box with gold fittings. Some stocking stuffer.

The Caviar Centre sells six varieties of caviar. The firm, heavy eggs of the Beluga cost approximately $60 for 30 grams, which is no more than an appetizer for one. Sevruga, smaller, stronger-tasting eggs from little sturgeon, is the least expensive at $20 for the same miserly amount.

"It is all about price and status," observes George Koyionis, fishmonger par excellence at Mike's in the St. Lawrence Market. "If sturgeon

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caviar were $2 a pound, would you take a pound and eat it for dinner?"

My answer is *uh-huh!* Here's my two bucks. Take me to the caviar orgy. Forget the sideshow with blinis and sour cream. I'll take mine straight and simple, with a Philistine squirt of lemon. Champagne is perfectly proper, but I won't sniff at a shot or three of frosted vodka.

Caviar used to be synonymous with the Russian product, processed in Astrakhan at the north end of the Caspian. This is no longer so. Industrial pollution is now decimating the Caspian stocks. Poachers are taking as much as the government monopoly, and murdering fisheries inspectors while they're at it. Organized crime is packing everything from lesser fish eggs to stones behind the correct labels. In the shambles of the former U.S.S.R., there is no predicting what you will find in the tin.

With the demise of the Russian industry, Iran, whose territory encompasses 1500 kilometres of south Caspian coastline, has leaped into the breach. Iranian caviar, today the mainstay of the Caviar Centre, is impeccably processed, vacuum-packed, properly dated, and very, very fine.

There are, however, other fish eggs in the sea: sturgeon is being experimentally farmed from Quebec to the Mississippi. Other caviars make no pretence of duplicating the mystique of sturgeon roe, but seem content to deliver pleasures all their own—and for a fraction of the price.

I am not fond of the lumpfish roe, which usually comes from Scandinavia and is consumed feverishly at gatherings of travel agents. But I have returned from the duty-free at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport with jars of trout and salmon trout caviar, and found them delightful. Unfortunately, neither fish is farmed for its eggs in Canada.

British Columbia turns out great quantities of fresh salmon caviar, high on flavour and low on prestige. The small, red eggs are from sockeye salmon and the larger, orange eggs from chub. I prefer the sockeye

for its firmness, pop on the palate, and richness of flavour. At the St. Lawrence Market, George Koyionis will sell you 112 grams for $7, less than a tenth of the price of Sevruga.

Perhaps it is time to consider the lowly whitefish. Pelee Treasures is an enterprising Ontario outfit specializing in Lake Erie whitefish caviar. Owners Garry and Cathie Penner produce 1000 kilograms a year. Pelee gold is taken at the beginning of the spawning season in October, while Pelee Diamond is late-harvested.

I conducted a casual tasting of several caviars based on colour, body, flavour and "likability." Lake Erie pickerel roe, not a commercial product, was creamy and mild, with the colour and consistency of sweet butter. Quebec sturgeon caviar, still in the experimental stage, was unpalatably oversalted, but it remains promising. Pelee Diamond displayed a gorgeous tangerine colour, complex flavour and an audible crunch better suited to popcorn.

Unsurprisingly, Caviar House Sevruga from Iran was the favourite, fresh-tasting and lightly salted with a buttery texture and mouth-filling flavour. The surprise was the relatively inexpensive Pelee Gold. All three tasters—sensitive but unprejudiced palates—ranked it second by a single point out of 50. They lauded the early-harvest whitefish caviar for its pleasing natural golden colour, tender-crisp texture, and depth of flavour.

Pass the bubbly, and here's to an emerging Canadian cuisine.

CAVIAR CAKE

If you must gild the caviar lily, try this playful recipe from Denis Jaricot, executive chef at the Four Seasons Hotel in Toronto. Sturgeon and whitefish caviar should prove equally agreeable.

Ingredients

- 1 loaf brioche, cut into 8 slices
- 60 g (2 oz) sour cream
- 1 egg, hardboiled, yolk and white separately and finely chopped
- 1 small bunch of chives, finely chopped
- 120 g (4 oz) sturgeon or whitefish caviar
- 1 lemon

Method

Using a cookie cutter, cut the brioche into 8 rounds, each 7.5 cm (3 inches) in diameter. Take four of the brioche rounds and place one in the centre of each of four plates.

Spread 5 ml (1 tsp) of sour cream over each of the four brioche rounds. Then sprinkle on layers of chopped egg yolk, chopped egg white, and chopped chives.

Cover the coated brioche rounds with the remaining four rounds. Spread a teaspoon of sour cream on each top round as if icing a cake. Finally spoon 30 g (1 oz) of caviar on top of each cake.

Garnish each caviar cake with a lemon wedge. Serves four.

JEREMY FERGUSON
Jeremy Ferguson writes about food and travel

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In the next issue of *Rotunda*...

The ROM, DNA, and Biodiversity

By George Cook

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A 17th-century silver grape cup, made in Augsburg, Germany, and now in the European collections of the Royal Ontario Museum, was a wedding gift, according to the inscription on its base.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRIAN BOYLE

Gifts of Silver Enhance ROM's European Collections

Continental silver from the 17th and 18th centuries is rarely found in North American museums, but as a result of recent gifts, the ROM's collections of British and Continental silver now rank among the top ten in North America. The ROM was the fortunate recipient of two donations—the bequest of seven pieces from Dr. William Howard Pugsley of Ottawa and Montreal, and a gift of four pieces from Mr. and Mrs. John Flemer.

Silver wares can be enjoyed for their beauty but they also can be used to illustrate the evolution of style and social customs, and it is in this capacity that silver is prominently displayed in the new south wing of the Samuel European Galleries. For example, the Baroque style can be studied through fine showy drinking cups produced on the Continent during the 1600s. Often the designs of such cups follow the naturalistic motifs of the late Gothic period created by craftsmen such as Hans Holbein.

One of the Flemer pieces is a grape cup, a common form of the German covered cup or *Deckelpokal*. Like much early Baroque silver, it is fashioned from a combination of silver and parcel gilt (partial gold plating). Created in Augsburg, a major

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centre of German silver production, the piece bears the mark of Matthaus Schaller (1582-1652). The curious band of fishlike faces in the auricular style around the base would have been considered very fashionable at the time. But the most fascinating detail of the cup is a Latin inscription, dated 4 July 1702, which indicates that the cup was a wedding gift to a military commander from the citizens of Claudiopolis.

The commander is identified as Adam Szekely de Borosjenö. The inhabitants of Transylvania, the mountainous eastern region of Hungary, were traditionally referred to as the Szekely. Today it may seem odd that a silver cup that was at least 50 years old was deemed an appropriate wedding gift. By 1700, however, it was already a long-established practice—beginning with the English Moscovy Company in the early 1600s—to send showy silver, which was no longer in style in England, as gifts to Eastern Europe. In fact this custom is responsible for the collection of pre-1650 silver in the Kremlin, which comprises diplomatic gifts to the Czars, and which ranks among the most important in the world for late Renaissance and Baroque pieces. The citizens of the currently unidentified city of Claudiopolis were undoubtedly pleased to be able to purchase such an elaborate second-hand piece at a good price. Further research will no doubt uncover more historical details. This is only one of the many stories that can be revealed by silver in the ROM's collections.

Other donations that will be covered in future issues of *Rotunda* include a 350-piece collection of 17th- and 18th-century British and Continental silver from a Toronto donor who also gave the Museum 150 caddy spoons, and the Georg Jensen silver bequest from Mrs. O. D. Vaughan, which includes funds to create proper display cases.

PETER KAELLGREN
Peter Kaellgren is an associate curator in the European Department, Royal Ontario Museum

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Rural Life in B

Simple textiles from southwestern

Cathei

A child's jacket is embroidered with a manaarin square. Collection of the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology.

COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Dragons' scales of gold-wrapped threads on an emperor's robe; a profusion of intricate, brightly coloured butterflies dancing across the gown of an official's wife: these are images that immediately come to mind at the mention of Chinese embroidery. However, there is another side to this centuries-old art: pieces made not of silk, but of cotton, decorated not in multicoloured floss, but in indigo-dyed cotton thread. These are the everyday textiles used by the rural population of southwestern China. Made by a largely illiterate people, these simple items are embroidered predominantly in cross-stitch with motifs that reflect both traditional Chinese designs and those that depict important events in the life of the folk population. With their lively designs and skilled workmanship the textiles reveal aspects of life in rural China.

Blue-and-white cross-stitched cottons were produced mainly in the

Catherine Pagani is an assistant professor of art history at the University of Alabama and a Gervers Fellow of the Royal Ontario Museum

LUE AND WHITE

na reveal the lives of their creators

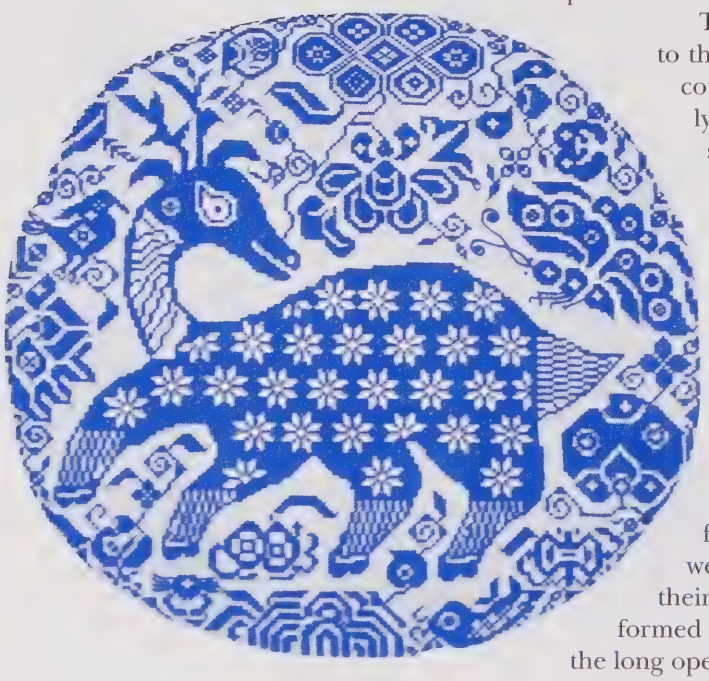
PAGANI

The lively designs of cotton blue-and-white embroidered textiles reveal aspects of life in rural China

southwestern province of Sichuan, a name which means "Four Rivers," from the mid-19th century until the early part of this century. The economy of Sichuan is based on farming: its main crop is rice, although other important products include maize, wheat, tea, and cotton. Silk is also produced and the province has been long known for its fine silk embroideries. The population is composed of ethnic Chinese as well as minorities including Tibetans, the Lolo, and the Miao. Sichuan, like the rest of the southwest, maintained its rural character for centuries and was slow to move to modernization. Even as late as the 1920s, there were no railroads in the area.

Cross-stitch on cotton is characteristic of much of the embroidery of Sichuan and the neighbouring provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou, especially among the minority groups who use multi-coloured threads to stitch geometric patterns. It is a durable and relatively simple technique, and appealed to the rural population who required that their textiles be practical

as well as decorative. Single-colour patterns, usually in blue, appear to be most common, and were not unique to embroideries; they were also used for tie-dyed textiles from this area. The blue comes from a native plant, *Polygorum tinctorum*, called *lan* in Chinese, whose leaves yield indigo. This colour has the advantages of requiring a simple cold-dyeing process and retaining its tone well over time.



The task of producing these textiles fell to the women who spun the locally grown cotton. Even the indigo came from family farms. After weaving the fabric on small looms in their homes, the women would embroider the fabric, carefully counting out the threads of the weave. Many of the textiles were made for dowries, and each woman showcased her skills at needlework as well as her sense of design. The resulting pieces —most commonly bed valances and coverlets—were for everyday use. In general, the coverlets were made using four long strips of cotton that were stitched together along their long edges. One of these strips formed a valance, which hung down on the long open side of the bed. (The beds in rural China were enclosed on three sides, or at least had some sort of lattice work, so it was not necessary for the cover to hang over more than one side of the bed.) Valances were also used on the upper part of the bed, and some were even embroidered with designs that resembled fringe.

Above: Because of its ability to find the fungus of immortality, the spotted deer is the symbol of longevity. Detail of a bed valance in the collection of the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology. Facing page: Auspicious plants in a vase are common elements of the embroidery found on folk textiles. The lotus, with its many seeds, represents the wish for many children. The Buddha's hand citron symbolizes wealth because it looks like a hand reaching for money. Cushion cover in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CATHERINE PAGANI

Unfortunately, because these embroideries, like other areas of folk craft, aroused little if any attention among the educated Chinese, there are no written records to aid our understanding of them. Furthermore, the textiles saw heavy use, sometimes being refashioned as children's clothing or recut and applied as patches. Some were used until they simply wore out. They were not considered worthy of collecting, and therefore few pieces survive intact. A note in the ROM's catalogue records attests to this sad fact: "Acquired in Chengtu, Szechuan Province. . . . They were considered worthless by vendors at the time."

Protestant missionaries who were sent to these areas in the 19th and early 20th centuries were the main collectors of the pieces that have survived. They also mentioned the textiles in their writings on local customs. Possibly the only contemporary illustration of the blue-and-white cross-stitched textiles comes from Reverend Justus Doolittle's *Social Life of the Chinese*, published in 1868, where a cross-stitched border peeks out from beneath a pant leg in a discussion of bound feet.

Lack of interest in the blue-and-white embroideries by the Chinese may be attributed in part to the modernization of the textile industry, and in part to the popularity of cheap imported printed cloth, which was considered more fashionable. Cotton-thread embroideries were no longer considered stylish, resulting in an eventual loss of the skills needed to produce them. Anthropologist Carl Schuster, who collected textiles in Sichuan and surrounding areas in the early 1930s, remarked that it "appears that the tradition is one with which the people no longer have living contact: they look at these

things almost as foreigners, or with the air of enlightened modern people throwing a contemptuous glance at a survival out of the dark past. It has nothing to say to them."

A great many subjects are associated with these embroideries, and while some motifs are more common than others, no two pieces are exactly alike. One westerner in China in the 1930s remarked that such embroidery "was an out-pouring of creative, precise art-forms. Girls and women in their few leisure hours, crowded the strips of cotton with symbolic motifs which can be read like a book!" These embroideries were regarded by this observer to be "a woman's art form—creative, liberating— the only art possible for a Szechwanese peasant woman of the time." Embroidery was one creative outlet: an unmarried woman spent many of her leisure hours in preparation for her wedding day, embroidering and sewing her wedding clothes. These, as well as the other items that would form her dowry, would be used for the day when she would, in a small way, be

"Girls and women crowded the strips of cotton with symbolic motifs which can be read like a book"

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN BOYLE

dressed and treated as if she were a woman of noble rank.

The designs may be classified into three main groups: auspicious messages; genre scenes, including pictures of domestic life; and literary subjects. A less common group consists of landscape scenes. These subjects appear to be closely connected to images found on *nianhua,* Chinese traditional New Year's woodblock prints. *Nianhua* were "illustrated books" used as a colourful and inexpensive means of decorating the home. Though their history dates back to the 5th century when prints were produced for use in Buddhist and Daoist monasteries, *nianhua* reached their height during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) and were used throughout China. They appealed to all strata of Chinese society and depicted themes that were immediately recognizable by all.

In conjunction with other folk arts, the relatively simple textiles speak eloquently for an illiterate people

Most of the motifs on the textiles are related to auspicious messages. This is to be expected, for in China there is a strong emphasis on symbols connected with good fortune, longevity, fecundity, and wealth. The images used come from a variety of sources: some are rebuses, or puns, on

the Chinese language. The Chinese word for bat, for example, pronounced *fu,* has a sound identical to that for good wishes. Other images may have originated from folk superstitions and beliefs. Included in this category are auspicious fruits such as the pomegranate, whose seeds represent many progeny, and the Buddha's hand citron, whose shape resembles a hand reaching for money.

The most common symbols are those connected with the desire for many children. This was particularly strong among rural populations. The

desire for male children was stronger than that for females, and when a son was born it was known as *daxi*, or great happiness. Symbolic of this desire are fruits and flowers with many seeds, *zi*, a play on the word for child, also pronounced *zi*. These auspicious plants are often shown together, a common combination being the pomegranate and the lotus. Sometimes children are shown emerging from a lotus flower or an opened pomegranate.

With the birth of a son came the strong wish that he become an official. In theory, education was open to all in China, and thus even a farmer from rural China, with the proper training, could write the imperial examinations. Success in these exams brought honour to the candidate and his family, and ensured a lifetime of prestigious employment in the civil service. Thus it is not surprising to find that many of the textiles are embroidered with the motif representing the wish to have many sons who would successfully pass the exams to become an official. The image of a boy astride an imaginary beast known as the *qilin* and carrying a lotus bloom is an elaborate pun that conveys the wish that the family will be blessed with many sons who will be awarded positions in government. For those who had entered the bureaucracy, official status was signified by an embroidered patch worn on the clothing, known as a mandarin square. One aspiring bureaucrat in rural Sichuan had a jacket with a mandarin square of two cavorting phoenixes embroidered by his mother.

Facing page: A table cover in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum. Above: The depiction of a child holding a lotus stalk while seated astride a *qilin* is an elaborate pun suggesting the wish to have many children who become officials. Detail of a valance in the collection of the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology.

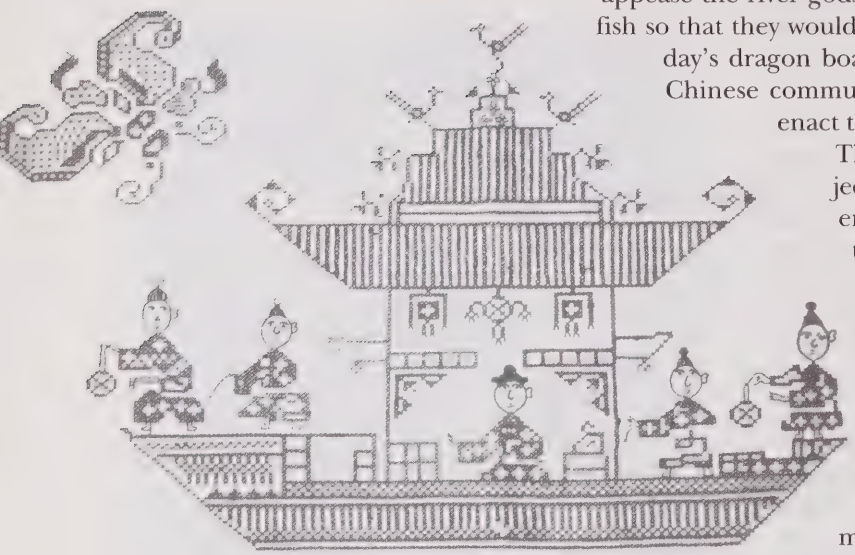
Prosperity is often represented by an old-style coin with a square hole in the centre. Coins, a popular image, are shown singly, or linked or strung together, sometimes even forming a diaper pattern on flowers. The image of the young Liu Hai frolicking with his pet three-legged toad also relates to wishes of wealth. In one version of the story, Liu Hai carries a string of coins in order to lure back his greedy toad when it escapes down a well.

Genre scenes found on the embroideries depict popular events in rural life. As with most cultures, one of the most important of these was marriage. An elaborate procession winds its way across the surface of one of the textiles. The wedding procession is led by two lantern-bearers, and consists of musicians and others carrying trays of presents. The bride is seated in the wedding chair, always a deep-red colour, carried by poles on the shoulders of four men. In a rural celebration, musicians play horns, brass timbales, drums, and flutes both to and away from the home of the bride with firecrackers signalling the start of the procession to the groom's house.

A favourite annual event was the Dragon Boat Festival, held on the fifth day of the fifth month, which could attract thousands or even tens of thousands of spectators in southwestern China. It is not surprising that this extraordinarily popular event found its way onto textiles. The festival

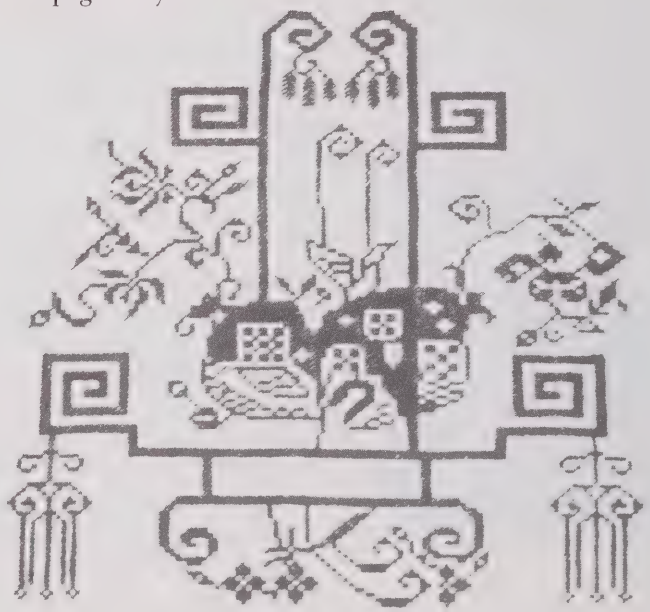
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CATHERINE PAGANI

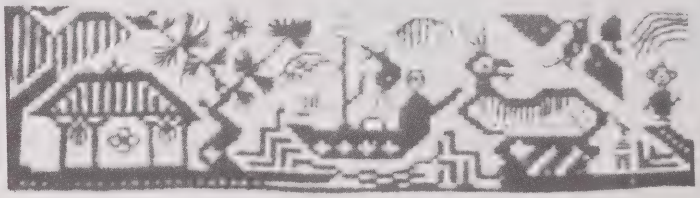
commemorates the suicide of the poet Qu Yuan (332-296 B.C.), who threw himself into the Miluo River, an affluent of Lake Dongting, to protest the corruption of government after he himself was falsely accused. The local people raced out in their boats in an effort to save Qu Yuan, but to no avail. Realizing that they would not find his body, the rescuers tossed glutinous rice dumplings, known as *zongzi*, into the water to appease the river gods and to provide food for hungry fish so that they would leave Qu Yuan's body alone. Today's dragon boat races, which are celebrated in Chinese communities throughout the world, reenact the search for Qu Yuan.



The designs relating to literary subjects are based on folk tales and legend as well as novels, and include the stories of famous historical people. It should be remembered that the people who made and used these textiles were for the most part illiterate, and that these embroidered pictures, based on stories passed down by an oral tradition, therefore served to convey information by means other than the written word.

One of the more popular folk stories is "The Tale of the White Serpent." In one version of the story, the scholar Xu Xian meets and falls in love with a beautiful woman by the name of Bai Suzhen who, unknown to him, is a ghost-demon whose natural form is that of a white snake. In the various twists and turns of the story, Bai Suzhen becomes trapped under the Thunder-Wind pagoda by an evil monk. Her son, an sacrifice at the pagoda, s freed. The embroidered sce Bai Suzhen's son kneeling i a pagoda that has a whi emerging from the top.





The wide variety of subject matter in these cross-stitched embroideries bespeaks a people who aspire to long life, wealth, and numerous progeny. In conjunction with other folk arts such as papercuts, woodcuts, and even folk opera, the relatively simple textiles speak eloquently for an illiterate people. They offer a tangible link to the past, and, as one missionary's wife said of the finely worked embroideries: "These will be witnesses to the creativity and innate artistic ability of rural Chinese women." ❦

Above: Figures in a boat. Below: The pomegranate with its many seeds represents the desire for many children. Both pieces are in the collection of the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CATHERINE PAGANI

ART

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Iroquoian Ceramics Unearthed

An urban backyard offers a unique insight to Ontario's Iroquoian past

Mima Kapches

When Samuel de Champlain arrived in the Iroquoian villages of southern Ontario in 1615, large, shiny copper kettles were part of the equipment that he carried. Archaeological evidence shows that it did not take the female inhabitants long to discover that the metal vessels were superior to their own traditional earthenware. The strong and durable copper pieces could be acquired ready-made—immediately

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ILLUSTRATION BY IVAN KOCSIS / MAP COURTESY OF MIMA KAPCHES

fit for cooking, storage, and ceremonial functions. Time no longer had to be spent making and repairing ceramics, and because the metalware could be placed directly over fire, cooking techniques changed as well.

But the introduction of these new products to the Iroquois brought about the decline and eventual loss of the tradition of ceramic manufacture, which had developed over millennia and had reached a high level of sophistication. Archaeologists examining the remains of vessels produced after the Iroquois began to use copper remarked on the decline in quantity, quality, and design detail. According to records, by the 18th century, when European missionaries and explorers were living among the Iroquois of New York, earthenware vessels were no longer made. All vessels and pots were metal, porcelain, glass, and crockery of European manufacture.

There are very few first-hand accounts of the production of Iroquoian vessels, possibly because of indifference on the part of male explorers and missionaries to domestic tasks performed by females. Descriptions, the earliest of which date from the 17th century, are not detailed; for example, Pierre Boucher's terse statement: "The women make pottery vessels." Although Gabriel Sagard did note:

The women...make them [pots], taking suitable earth which they sift and pulverize very thoroughly, mixing it with a little sandstone. Then when the lump has been shaped like a ball they put a hole in it with their fist, and this they keep enlarging, scraping it inside with a little wooden paddle as much and as long as is necessary to complete the work.

Furthermore, no sites that could have been associated with ceramic production and firing have been discovered in Ontario or other parts of northeastern North America. Archaeologists have had to turn to other sources in their speculations about the methods of Iroquoian ceramic production. They have looked to anthropological studies of peoples who make and fire pottery by unsophisticated means that may be similar to that of the Iroquois. Modern ceramicists are also able to make observations and offer clues. Although some solid archaeological data may be used, most discussions of Iroquoian pottery manufacture are based on other sources.

Ceramic production and firing stations are not easy to find—they are virtually invisible to archaeologists. There were no specialized tools or other implements used for making pots that researchers could hope to find as evidence of such a location. Unlike residential sites, which usually contain large quantities of archaeological residue, the pottery manufacturing sites contain little residue because they were used probably for only short periods of time. So the discovery in 1988 of the Hill site of North York, Metropolitan Toronto, was an exciting breakthrough.

Located on the Hill family's property, the site is situated on a small floodplain in the ravine behind the

Preceding pages: An artist's conception of Iroquoian women and children firing newly made ceramic pots. Plan view of Feature 4, Hill site, 1990

Top: During the initial period of contact between Europeans and Iroquois in the 17th century, some Iroquoian ceramics were created in a pedestal format instead of the usual globular shape. The pedestal format was inspired by European goblets.
Bottom: A traditional Iroquoian pot decoration is visible on this sherd.
Facing page: A member of the field crew carefully begins to excavate an area marked in the Hill site.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MIMA KAPCHES / ILLUSTRATIONS BY EMIL HUSTON

Right: Members of the field crew sift containers of soil in order to retrieve pottery sherds and other evidence of Iroquoian occupation. Following pages: Iroquoian women and children collect finished pots and discard broken pieces after the fire dies down.

Top: A pottery vessel is created by pinching together coils of clay. Middle: The surface of the vessel is smoothed by using a clam shell. Bottom: A bossing pattern is applied to the vessel.

house and is bordered on the west by a creek that flows southeast into the Don River, which in turn flows south into Lake Ontario. A spring wells up at the base of the floodplain. I found the site when the Milners, neighbours of the Hill family, informed me that their son had found an artifact in their backyard and invited me to investigate. After working in the Milner backyard in 1987 and 1988, I asked the Hills for permission to carry out further investigations in their yard. That is where the Early Iroquoian ceramics were recovered.

Three seasons of excavations, in 1988, 1989, and 1990, proved that the Hill site did not represent a typical Iroquoian settlement. There was no evidence of a palisaded village or even a hamlet with one or more small longhouses and food refuse from seasons of occupation, which led me to believe that this was a specialized site.

What was immediately evident from the excavation was the poor quality of the ceramics and their distribution in undefined fired and carbonized areas. At first I thought the areas were sheet middens, thin garbage deposits from adjacent residential areas, but then it became clear that no such residential areas had existed. Nothing suggested burned trees; the fired areas were restricted to the refuse heaps. At this point I began to suspect that the Hill site was a pottery production and firing location, and that the reason for the poor quality of the ceramics was that they were the discards.

From my research a picture emerged of Iroquoian women passing down from one generation to the next their ceramic techniques and traditions, including specific vessel shapes and decorative motifs characteristic of a tribal area. The process began with the collecting of clay from a source in a stream bed. For the sake of convenience, the women would work near the source to prepare the clay for modelling, first by drying it, then by sifting it to remove impurities, and finally by adding a temper of grit. To model a vessel, a single lump of clay was used. The ceramicist would position her fist in the centre of the lump and a wooden paddle on the outside, and then draw up the sides of the vessel to form the globular body. On average, cooking vessels were 25 centimetres high. It has been noted on early Iroquoian sites that sometimes there was insufficient clay to properly finish the rims of vessels. In those cases, a fillet, or additional roll of clay, was carefully attached to the neck and collar area so that the rim could be completed. Unfortunately, if the bonds were weak, the vessels would break at the joins. On later Iroquoian sites, ceramicists were faced with the same problem, but the fillets were so skilfully added that the seams can rarely be seen.

Pots were probably made during the summer months when the clay was easy to collect and the pots could dry slowly before firing, and also in the same place that the clay was prepared—otherwise it would have been necessary to carry heavy loads of material

PHOTOGRAPH BY MIMA KAPCHES/DRAWINGS BY JOHN PEMBERTON

and water uphill to the villages. After the vessels dried, they would have been placed on rocks or waste sherds in a shallow depression and covered with wood that was then set afire. The firing may have lasted for as short a time as 30 minutes, and because bonfires are more difficult to control than kilns, the number of pots destroyed was probably high.

It is likely that the firing took place in a secluded ravine, possibly the manufacture site. The tinder-dry state of the village longhouses would have put them at great risk if the firing were nearby. In the case of the Hill site, the manufacture and firing may have taken place by the ravine, and the village may have existed on the nearby plateau, where a modern subdivision now stands.

During the third year of work the area of excavation was expanded. Fortunately, the Hill backyard is large and the family very supportive and patient, and this combination made possible the discovery of what may be the remnant of an Iroquoian open-pit firing.

"Feature 4" comprised a small, isolated concentration of ceramics in an irregularly shaped area of ash overlain by black soil with carbon inclusions, measuring approximately 140 cm x 120 cm x a mere 5 cm deep. The ceramics were concentrated in the southern part of the area. Contemporary potters describe the action of pushing aside broken vessels from the centre of the firepit, and this is what appears to have happened here. Radiocarbon techniques combined with characteristics of the pottery sherds date the site to about AD 1298, placing it in the late Pickering to Uren transitional period of the late Early Ontario Iroquoian tradition.

Aspects of the ceramics suggest that some of them were discards. Although a few pieces have carbonized food residue, analysis shows they weren't used much; other pieces have star cracks that would have led to the cracking of vessel walls and fillet breaks; and signs of firing appear on the interior surfaces of several sherds. Combining these data with the site's location away from any settlement and the presence of ash that could have been caused by a bonfire, it was concluded that this was once the location of an Iroquoian pottery manufacture site.

How was it possible that an urban backyard contained archaeological resources in such pristine condition? Most of the residential house construction that took place in the Metropolitan Toronto region before 1980 was of the "footprint" variety. This means that the area excavated for the house was identical to the plan or "footprint" of the structure. The surrounding property was not damaged and, therefore, fragile archaeological evidence was left untouched. With the bulldozing techniques now used, the entire property is disrupted and archaeological evidence is destroyed. But there are probably many backyards in the Toronto region that still contain important information about the past of Ontario's first peoples. ❦

ILLUSTRATION BY IVAN KOCSIS

Home Sweet Home

Pastille burners sweetened the air in 19th-century middle-class English homes. Today they are a mirror of society of that time

Conrad Biernacki

Towards the end of the 18th century in England, the Industrial Revolution encouraged the migration of rural populations to England's cities. The rapid growth of urban populations led to many problems, including overcrowded slums, the accumulation of unmanageable amounts of garbage and human waste that was left to rot in piles, and poorly planned open sewers. These conditions created intolerable odours and, combined with the contaminated water supply, promoted rampant disease, culminating in London's cholera epidemics of 1832 and 1848. It was not until massive public works projects of the

Conrad Biernacki is curator of the exhibition
Home Sweet Home: Pastille Burners of the 19th Century,
which continues at The George R. Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art until 22 January 1995

The basic shape of 19th-century English pastille burners was often influenced by Picturesque-style architecture reproduced in attractive publications available to a broad market. The burner pictured above is noteworthy for its lilac colour. Lilac was perfected as a tint in the early 1800s.

1850s and the 1860s and the Hygiene Movement of the 1870s and 1880s that urban sanitation problems would be tackled.

Another social development of the Industrial Revolution was the rise of the middle class. This group brought about the industrialization of England and as a result enjoyed newfound prosperity. Exposed to the filthy conditions of the cities, the middle class joined others in their belief that disease could be transmitted by the foul odours themselves. To improve the air and protect their health at home the middle class burned pastilles, cone-shaped tablets of aromatic paste, in special porcelain or pottery containers.

The use of incense is a practice that is almost as old as human history. Incense was probably first used to mask the unpleasant odours of animal sacrifices and later symbolically replaced the live offerings during such rituals. For centuries incense has been an important part of worship for many of the world's religions. And anywhere hygienic conditions have been less than ideal, the diffusion of perfumes has provided welcome relief.

Porcelain was a Chinese innovation of the 7th or 8th century. A strong European market for Chinese porcelain developed by the 17th century. When the method for producing porcelain was discovered in Meissen, Germany, in the early 1700s, the influence of Chinese goods inspired a widespread passion for Chinese-style objects. Among the first to be produced were incense burners in the form of seated Oriental figures. These hollow figures, with open mouths to permit the escape of scented smoke, were made for members of the upper class, who perfumed the air of their homes.

English pottery and porcelain manufacturers, located mainly in Staffordshire, produced a wide range of pastille burners. These included models that were affordable to the middle class. Rather than Oriental figures, the English burners took the form of cottages, farmhouses, churches, and castles.

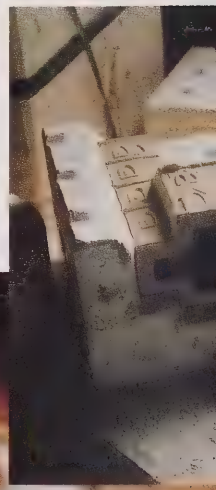
Pastille burners in the form of miniature versions of flower-encrusted English country cottages were closely related to the Picturesque style of architecture in vogue during the late 18th and early

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRIAN BOYLE

Pastille burners in the form of miniature versions of flower-encrusted English country cottages, such as those pictured to the left and above, are closely related to the Picturesque style of architecture in vogue during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

19th centuries, the importance of garden architecture, and the contemporary passion for flowers. The Picturesque style was based on the belief that people had been corrupted by society and city living, and as a remedy it advocated the return to a simple way of life that was in harmony with nature. The ideal residence was not the classical stately palace, but rather a vine-covered thatched cottage known as a *cottage ornée*, which embodied the essential Picturesque traits of asymmetrical arrangement of forms and a variety of textures. They and other garden buildings were rusticated structures that seemed to grow out of their surroundings. The garden buildings, pavilions for picnics and shelters from unexpected showers, were positioned to enhance vistas from the country houses.

Much like fashion today, the Picturesque style was rapidly communicated to a broad public, as well as to the manufacturers of pastille burners, through a flood of attractive publications made possible by the development of inexpensive mass printing techniques, such as aquatint and lithography. Many architects, philosophers, and social critics supported the Picturesque Movement. James Malton (1761-1803), an architect and author, stated in *An Essay on British Cottage Architecture* (London, Hookham & Carpenter, 1798) that "The wise, the virtuously independent, who prefer the pure and tranquil retirement of the country, to the foetid joys of the tumultuous city, are they who take the most likely means to enjoy that blessing of life, happiness." While the *cottage ornée* inspired the forms of pastille burners, the



To create a pastille burner, the main body of the piece is produced in a mould. In the case of this burner, the windows are cut from the moulded form. Next prefabricated decoration is added. Then the piece is painted after an initial firing.

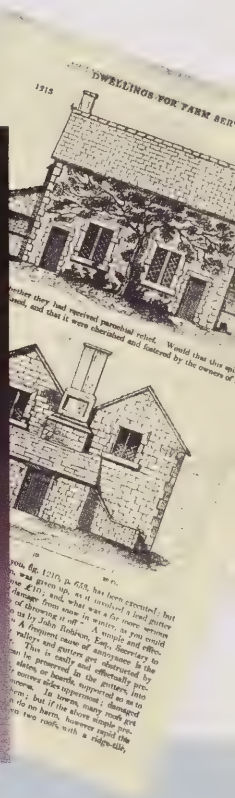
burners provided a symbol of the happy life.

Appreciation of flowers mirrored the structure and tastes of early 19th-century English society. Floral pursuits flourished in spite of—and perhaps because of—rapid industrial growth and urbanization. Widespread interest in flowers was a legacy from the 18th century, when almost 9000 new plants were introduced into England. Growing, collecting, and identifying plants were fashionable pursuits, and botanical books abounded, many of them with delicately drawn and beautifully coloured illustrations. In 19th-century drawing rooms, flowers were the dominant decorative motif and served as allegories of all the vices and virtues. They were used to convey messages of love, as memorials to the departed, and as status symbols for an increasingly affluent and well-educated middle class. Potted plants, dried floral arrangements, and ornamental ceramic wares, hand-painted with floral sprays or encrusted with modelled flowers, ensured that the parlour was always in bloom. Following the fashion, pastille burners were often embellished with brightly enamelled, oversized flowers.

The Gothic Revival movement of the early 19th century inspired pastille burners in the shapes of churches and castles. Church-style burners suited people wishing to demonstrate their piety. The burners also suggested a romantic view of a rapidly disappearing rural way of life. Castle-style burners echoed a revived interest in Mediaeval architecture inspired in part by the novels of Sir Walter Scott. To the newly prosperous, they were also symbols of old family traditions and connections.

Continuous innovation and change were the hallmarks of 19th-century decorative arts, and growing incomes and the need to keep apace of changing fashion motivated endless shopping for the latest in furnishings and accessories. Improved technology in ceramic production and decoration was driven by, and drove demand.

Manufacturers of pastille burners economically added variety and novelty to their product lines by applying different decoration to the same moulded shape. Applied flowers were hand-made, and there-



There was great enthusiasm for flowers in early 19th-century English society, in part as a reaction to rapid industrial growth and urbanization. Potted plants, dried arrangements, and ornamental ceramic wares kept the parlour in bloom. Following the fashion, pastille burners were often embellished with brightly enamelled, oversized flowers, as in the example shown on the facing page. However, not everyone wanted flower-encrusted pastille burners. In more modest versions, such as those pictured above, simple low-relief decoration was moulded along with the body, and polychrome enamelling completed the appearance.

fore produced in an infinite variety of shapes and sizes. They could be applied in different positions and enamelled in a choice of colours. Strings of finely shredded clay were added to outline chimneys, rooflines, windows, or walls with moss. But not everyone wanted flower-encrusted pastille burners. In more modest versions simple low-relief decoration was moulded along with the body, and polychrome enamelling completed the appearance of the piece. Very few manufacturers marked the wares and so one way to identify a particular pastille burner is to match it with drawings in factory pattern books of the period.

One of the many interesting developments in the ceramics industry of the early 1800s was the perfection of lilac as a colour. Sometimes lilac colour was mixed into the clay before pieces were moulded. Other times moulded pieces were dipped into a lilac bath to coat the whole body.

A combination of advances in urban sanitation practices and a new understanding of the role of germs and bacteria in the spread of sickness and disease rendered pastille burners obsolete. However, factories such as Leeds, Kent, and Coalport either continued to produce the burners or reintroduced them as new and profitable product lines because their decorative appeal made them collectable objects as early as the 1910s.

In the 20th century the practice of scenting the indoor environment has become more popular than ever. Today's consumer can choose from a myriad of room-scenting products. Those that use heat to release their fragrances recall pastille burners of the 19th century. ❦

The charming dairy (right) designed by John Nash (1752-1835) for Blaise Castle House and Estate is the type of garden building to have inspired the form of the pastille burner pictured above.

Making Pastilles

France, considered to be the world's major and most prestigious creator of fragrance, supplied England with pastilles in the early 19th century. Major English perfume houses, such as Floris of London, sold imports but also made their own brands and gave them evocative French names such as *Bois de Santal, Bouquet, Miel,* and *Millefleurs.*

Pastilles could also be made at home. Numerous household management books published from the 1820s to the 1860s provided many pastille recipes. Although each recipe varied in its specific ingredients, the ingredients were chosen from five categories:

Charcoal: Used in powdered form, this primary ingredient is the combustible base that produces the necessary heat (and very little soot) to vaporize the pastille's aromatic ingredients.

Stabilizer: Nitre (also known as saltpetre) or a sugary substance, such as syrup, is added to ensure even burning of the pastille.

Resins: These substances release their individual aromas when burned and also act as fixatives for the essential oils.

Scents: Most of the sweet and tantalizing smells come from essential oils and a variety of dried and powdered herbs, spices, and flower petals.

Gums: These are the binding agents that hold all the ingredients together.

The following is an historical pastille recipe from *Five Thousand Receipts in All the Useful and Domestic Arts,* by Colin Mackenzie (London, G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1823).

Powder separately the following ingredients, and then mix them together on a marble slab.

- 2 lb. fine charcoal
- 1 lb. frankincense
- 1 lb. gum benzoin
- 8 oz. gum storax

Add to this composition the following liquids:

- 6 oz. tincture of benzoin
- 2 oz. essence of ambergris*
- 1 oz. essence of musk
- 2 oz. almond oil
- 4 oz. clear syrup

Mix the whole into a stiff paste and form into pastilles, of a conical shape, which dry in the heat of the sun. If more liquid should be required for the paste, add warm water.

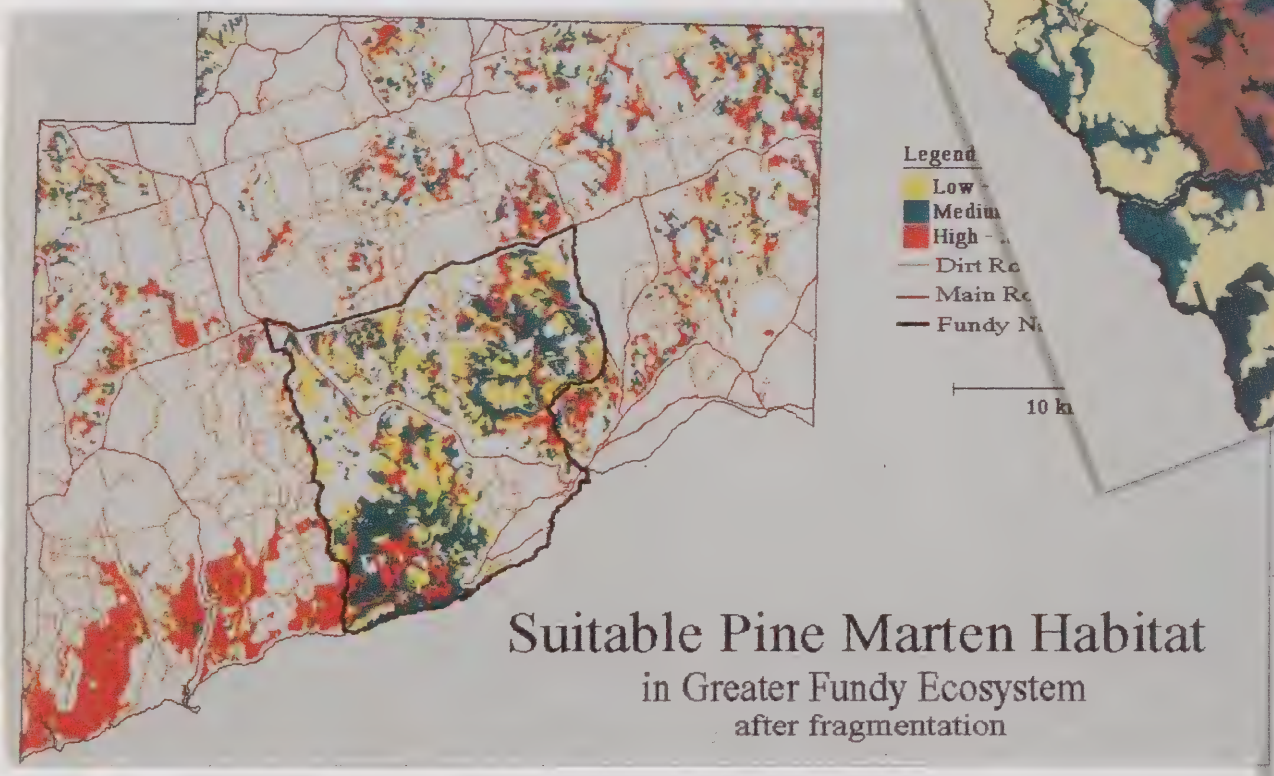
*Ambergris is a waxy substance found floating on the ocean surface. It is produced in the stomach of the sperm whale to coat the indigestible beaks of squids. Before a whale dies, it expels the contents of its stomach. Ambergris has a very pleasant ocean spray aroma and was used in cosmetics. With the decline of the whale populations and whaling, ambergris is now too rare for commercial use.

CITY OF BRISTOL MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

MAPPING BIODIVERSITY

The super tools of town planners, political candidates, and business promoters, geographic information systems are now applied to museum natural history collections

DAVID BARR AND WILLIAM MICHAEL CARTER



SPANS GIS, COURTESY TYDAC TECHNOLOGIES INC.

PICTURE THIS SCENARIO IN THE NOT-TOO-distant future: A national consortium of federal, provincial, and municipal agencies teamed with community groups and non-governmental organizations is given a mandate to protect Canadian environments sensitive to destruction. To make decisions, the consortium calls upon the nation's natural history museums to ask questions such as: "What invertebrate species (snails, worms, insects, etc.) exist in Canada?" "Where do they occur?" "Which of their habitats are most valuable and most at risk?" "What are the most effective ways to preserve them?" Traditionally the task of responding to such ques-

David Barr is a curator in the Invertebrate Zoology Department, Royal Ontario Museum. William Michael Carter is an anthropologist studying geographic information systems.

Geographic information systems plot various categories of information, such as forest cover at two different points in time, in Fundy National Park.

tions is very complex and time-consuming if not impossible.

Now imagine that a powerful geographic information system (GIS) and a nationwide database are available. With these resources a single curator, in consultation with colleagues from St. John's to Victoria, could sit down at a computer terminal and call up the information on a screen displaying a large map of the country. First one type of information—perhaps on butterflies—and then another—on fresh-

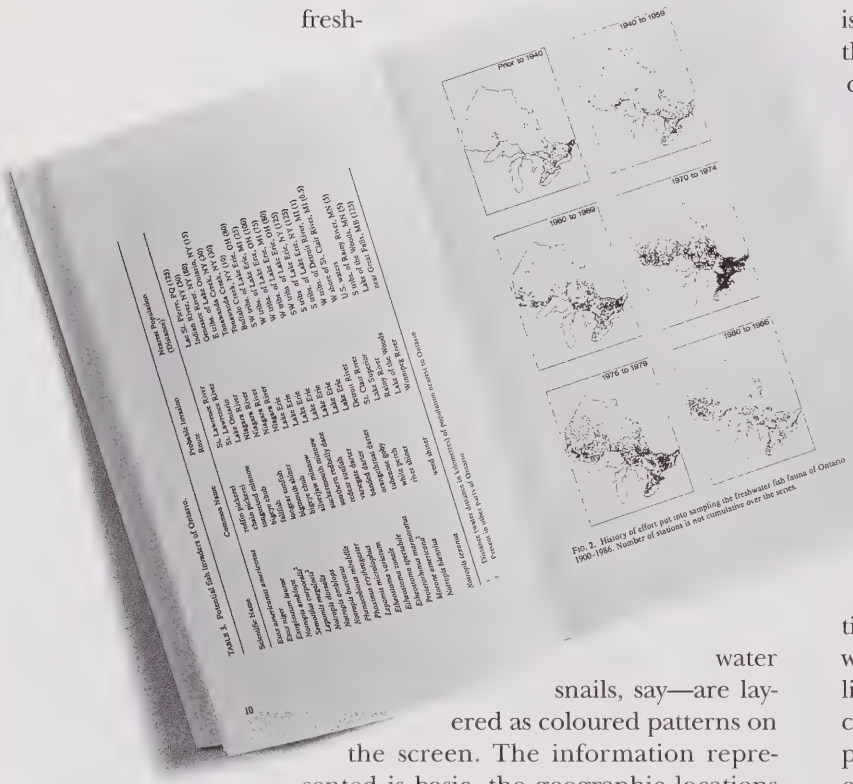


Fig. 2. History of effort put into sampling the freshwater fish fauna of Ontario 1900–1986. Number of stations is not cumulative over the series.

water snails, say—are layered as coloured patterns on the screen. The information represented is basic, the geographic locations associated with specimens held in museum collections. However, as layer follows layer and the total quantity of information represented increases, the composite picture takes on a patterning quite different from that characterizing any single species or group of species.

Over southwestern Ontario and again in British Columbia's coastal mountain range, brilliant yellow hotspots of invertebrate diversity develop. In the Yukon, a pale lavender region of rare endemic species appears. And in the forested regions of central Ontario, the angry red of human pressures endangers the characteristic boreal ecosystem when a human-use database is combined with information from museum collections.

A few commands are deftly entered by fingers flying across the keyboard. The data is resorted and displayed sequentially in time slices from the past, looking somewhat like the time series of radar screens broadcast on the local weather channel. The patterns of diversity hotspots shift with the passing decades as environmental destruction whittles away at the numbers of living species or as changing temperatures and range extensions produce significant new areas of biological diversity. Priorities are set for areas needing attention.

The Royal Ontario Museum and other institutions are working to make this futuristic scenario a reality. As so often happens, the most advanced research tool has become available to museum workers largely by serendipity. Geographic information systems were originally developed to assist community planners, political analysts, civil engineers, and a variety of businesses to cope with mountains of complex information relating to the state of affairs in different places.

For instance, town planners faced with the problem of an overloaded sewage system would want to see a map showing the combined effects of rainfall and drainage patterns, areas of housing and industry, and data on family size and water use, in order to pinpoint strategic locations for the construction of new facilities while protecting natural waterways. A political commentator would be interested in combining the results of recent opinion polls with the voting pattern of the last election. The vivid red, blue, orange, and green maps broadcast by television across the nation on election night, updated instantaneously with hundreds of thousands of data items in addition to computer predictions, are perhaps the most widely viewed results of a GIS in action. Business people use the same software to perform tasks such as sales territory planning, customer survey analysis, market share studies, and customer profiles.

Strictly defined, geographic information systems link computer drawing routines to information that is tied to geographic locations. As a result, data can be visualized in the form of maps or other geographic or spatial representations. Conceived in Canada during the 1960s, these tools have only recently become sufficiently flexible to be adopted for general use in museums.

Pages from A Checklist of Ontario Freshwater Fishes, Annotated with Distribution Maps, by N. E. Mandrak and E. J. Crossman, published by the Royal Ontario Museum. The computer-generated maps would have taken much longer to produce and would be difficult to update by conventional methods.

In fact, the whole realm of research on geographic information is undergoing a revolution. For the maximum benefit to be derived from museum collection data, geographic information systems alone are not enough. The process of "thinking spatially" promises to become a good deal more sophisticated in the very near future. Some believe that we are fast entering an era where geographic information science is emerging as a comprehensive new discipline devoted to better understanding our planet and the life it supports.

Museum biological research is bound to profit from the new tools for handling geographic information. For example, dozens of ROM publications over the years have shown species distributions by dots plotted on a map. Such maps were created slowly by an artist or biologist painstakingly reviewing each collection record, finding the right position on a large map of the province, and then inking in a neat dot. Computerized mapping can now produce such illustrations in minutes instead of days, and update them even more quickly each time new specimen records are added to the database.

The 300 maps in the two-volume work *Breeding Birds of Ontario,* completed by George K. Peck and Ross D. James in 1987, still had to be produced manually based on 80,000 records in the ROM's Ornithology Department. Biology departments across the Museum are now at various stages in the process of computerizing records.

The ROM's ichthyology collections were among the first to be computerized. In 1992, the Museum published *A Checklist of Ontario Freshwater Fishes, Annotated with Distribution Maps,* by Nicholas E. Mandrak and E. J. Crossman. This book contains maps showing geographic range represented by dots for 165 different species, subspecies, and selected hybrids, including the most popular sport fishes of the province. The maps are plotted from a database containing 115,046 records of fish collections made over a period of about 90 years, and combine information available in the collections of the ROM and the Canadian Museum of Nature, as well as records collected over the years by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

Mandrak and Crossman's maps would have taken two to three years to produce conventionally. The records are plotted not only species by species, but also in six different time periods dating from about 1900 to 1986. The maps of the different time periods dramatically show the waxing and waning of effort in field research on freshwater fishes. It is also clear that there are still vast areas of northern Ontario for which the details of fish distribution are virtually unknown. Exploration of the full value of the information contained in these museum collections has just started.

A wealth of new possibilities arises with the ability to perform sophisticated manipulations of museum data and to combine it with other forms of computerized information. Plotting plant collections against soil and geological databases may identify some of the dependent relationships between plant distribution and the chemistry of the Earth. It is now possible to obtain correlations between the range limits of both plants and animals and extremes of temperature, precipitation, wind, and other factors available in meteorological databases. This is the kind of information that leads to improved understanding of why natural species occur where they do—essential if we are to try to preserve their existing distribution ranges.

Some of the most remarkable results will start to appear as geographic information systems incorporate sophisticated statistical tools for data analysis and routines for environmental modelling. This will allow researchers to relate museum data to other environmental variables, which will in turn improve their ability to predict how ecosystems work and help them to decide the wisest ways to manage the Earth's resources.

The opportunities for looking at things in new ways seem endless. Suppose that a GIS is used to compare the documented occurrence of a rare species of butterfly to various elements of its habitat, such as proximity to watercourses, altitude, and the presence of a food plant. Before long, the most important physical and biological factors determining the butterfly's distribution are discovered. The system can then be used to show all of those areas within a country where the appropriate habitat conditions occur. And if some of the prime habitats are not associated with collection records for the species, then the biologist has uncovered target sites for additional fieldwork where undiscovered populations of the species may well be found. In this way, existing collections may be used to predict the source of future collections. Be-

Geographic information science is a means to better understanding our planet and the life it supports

Different applications of geographic information systems are shown by the distribution map of vineyards in Niagara-on-the-Lake and the set of maps showing urban growth and news reporting in Canada between 1845 and 1885.

COURTESY OF THE SCHOOL OF APPLIED GEOGRAPHY, RYERSON POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

yond biology collections, geographic information research can also apply to geology and mineralogy collections and may prove useful to archaeologists as well.

Biodiversity research has become the preoccupation not only of environmental managers but also of natural history museums. Several museums have started biodiversity units or research groups. At the ROM, the proposed Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Biology is intended to provide a vigorous focus for the unique strengths of the institution's collections.

Research on geographic information will be a mainstay of biodiversity studies. And the new approaches in that field are proving once again the ongoing value of museum life sciences collections as irreplaceable archives. Maintaining the collections will make it possible to answer questions in the future that current levels of knowledge have yet to reveal. ❦

Newspaper circulation can be used to define the limits of the regions served by the cities where they were published. In 1845 Montréal enjoyed unrivalled access to information flows in the colonies, and her leading newspapers, which carried business items, circulated over a large area. Information circulated through channels that were defined by the technology of the day; for example, in 1849 the telegraph had not yet supplanted the horse and the river boat. The routes by which information flowed can be established by noting the sources given and the dates of publication of news articles. For important events, such as a great fire, many newspapers carried the story. The paths that information travelled and the delay in its receipt define the position of urban centres within a communication network and thus suggest an urban hierarchy. The three cases shown in the chart at the lower left, reveal that news travelled through different channels and at varying speeds.

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The **Acadia** *is the largest piece in the collection of Halifax's Maritime Museum of the Atlantic.*

Maritime Museum of the Atlantic

FOR MANY OF THE 56 YEARS THAT C.S.S. *Acadia* was in service, courageous men worked below decks feeding the triple-expansion steam engine. They laboured in the cramped quarters housing the engine's two enormous coal boilers where the temperature hovered around 38 degrees Celsius (100 degrees Fahrenheit). The steam generated forced the engine and the single screw propeller to drive the ship at speeds up to 12 knots per hour.

Above decks, the luxury of oak and mahogany panelling was a world removed from the smothering heat of the boiler room. At break time, filthy with coal dust and sweat, the stokers clambered up a tiny ladder wedged behind a red-hot boiler for a breath of fresh air or a cigarette.

Visitors today can freely walk the decks and peer into the boiler room of C.S.S. *Acadia* where she is permanently berthed outside the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, in the same harbour that was her home port for more than five decades.

The *Acadia* was a hydrographic survey ship built by luxury yacht builders in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, for the Canadian Hydrographic Service. Launched in 1913, she spent most of her years of service surveying the coastal waters of eastern Canada from the Bay of Fundy to Hudson Bay. Providing mariners with information on water depth, tides, and currents, she played an essential part in safe navigation. However, during both world wars, rechristened H.M.C.S. *Acadia*, she served as a patrol and training vessel in the Royal Canadian Navy.

Although in later years the *Acadia* was equipped with the latest hydrographic and navigational technology, including a gyro compass and radar, and her bridge, wheelhouse, pilot house, and captain's cabin were completely rebuilt, she still possesses many qualities of her original design such as the steam engine, coal-fired boilers, oak and mahogany panelling in the hydrographers' quarters, and the riveted plates on her hull.

This remarkable vessel was declared of national historic significance in 1980. Since then, conservators have had the ongoing challenge of preserving the now 81-year-old ship. Visitors can watch the staff repair, preserve, and replace parts to keep the *Acadia* as ship-shape as she was at the time of her retirement in 1969.

C.S.S. *Acadia* is the largest artifact

PHOTOGRAPH BY RON MERRICK, NOVA SCOTIA DEPT. OF EDUCATION

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in the collection of the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic. Located in the restored historic waterfront area of Halifax, near where the *Bluenose* is moored, the museum building comprises the restored William Robertson and Son Ship-Chandlery and its warehouse dating back to the 1870s, as well as a modern exhibition hall.

Its towering glass floor-to-ceiling windows stretching two stories high, the exhibition hall overlooks Halifax harbour where the museum has some of the few available berthing spaces, making it a popular destination for visiting boats. Government, naval, and commercial cargo vessels pass by the museum daily, affording ample opportunities for visitors to interpret Halifax's continuing maritime traditions.

There isn't a day that passes without children clambering over the huge ship anchors fixed permanently to the wharf outside the museum. One anchor was recovered from the ocean and brought to the museum by the crew of a Russian vessel. Youngsters were so taken by the find that the interpretive staff wrote a beautifully illustrated children's book called *The Mystery of the Lost Anchor.* It describes how curatorial staff collect and preserve artifacts, and with the assistance of interpretive staff, tell their stories. The book's popularity led to a play, and now a touring musical is being developed for children around the province.

The Maritime Museum of the Atlantic was founded as the Maritime Museum of Canada by a group of naval officers interested in preserving Canada's naval past. In recent years the focus changed to Nova Scotian maritime history. As a result the collection is centred on the Canadian Navy and Merchant Marine Services and features naval and merchant marine ship models, naval dress, and many artifacts from the 200-year-old Halifax dockyard.

The grand glass-encased exhibition hall houses the small craft collection, featuring the ornate Royal Barge built for Queen Victoria, a salt-marsh workboat, fishing dories, and pleasure boats that once skimmed the waters around Nova Scotia.

The museum also reflects the tragic side of maritime history, the legacy of storms, icebergs, rocks, and shoals. One display includes the lifeboat and Lyle gun from a lifestation built on Sable Island in the early 1800s. The sandbars surrounding the island have always been a threat to mariners.

Famous sea disasters are prominently represented in the exhibits. The museum has a small collection of artifacts that washed ashore from the *Titanic.* (Victims of the sunken liner are buried in cemeteries throughout Halifax.) During the First World War, Halifax was a thriving port where convoys of ships gathered for the voyage to Europe. In December 1917, a French ship loaded with a highly explosive cargo collided with a Norwegian vessel, resulting in the world's largest man-made explosion before the atomic age. The blast killed more than 1700 people. More than 12,000 houses were damaged, and 1630 were completely destroyed. The explosion and subsequent fires left 6000 people homeless.

Museum visitors are given an eerie sense of the loss of life suffered in that fateful moment of 9:05 am, 6 December 1917. At the entrance to the exhibit they can compare the contents of their pockets to what is found in the museum's rather macabre collection of 400 tiny mortuary bags, holding the contents of the pockets of school children, longshoremen, factory labourers, and many other Haligonians who were casualties of the blast.

The chandlery, which once supplied shipowners, builders, and captains with everything from "a needle to an anchor," was owned by the Robertson family for a century. Maritime life of the late 19th century is interpreted in the Days of Sail exhibit, housed in the chandlery warehouse. Shipbuilders and tradesmen from coastal towns and villages built and owned wooden vessels that carried cargo worldwide. Visitors can step into a reconstructed deckhouse for a simulated experience of the look and feel of riding the waves in a coastal schooner. Even without actual damp sea air and spray a few of the would-be sailors feel quite seasick. Conservators, using many of the original 19th-century shipbuilding tools and techniques, can be observed at work in another section of the warehouse. The wonderful old building with its huge wooden beams also houses a large collection of steam and sailing ship models, paintings, and navigational equipment.

The Age of Steam level of the museum tells the story of the steam-powered, steel-hulled vessels that transformed the shipping industry in the late 19th century. Ship models such as the ocean liner *Aquitania* and the buoy tender *Lady Laurier* display the propulsion systems and ship designs that characterized this period of ocean travel.

Spanning approximately 250 years, the collection is strongest from the period between 1850 and 1950, reflecting the level of shipping activity in the region in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the impact of two world wars.

The Maritime Museum of the Atlantic is the marine history branch of the Nova Scotia Museum. Together with the Fisheries Museum of the Atlantic in Lunenburg its mandate is to collect, preserve, research, and interpret objects, specimens, and materials that best illustrate the maritime heritage of Nova Scotia. The museum also has a reference library, model-maker shop, and carpentry and boatbuilder workshop. Films, lectures, demonstrations, and special exhibits highlighting portions of the collection or significant marine events are presented year round. There is much to explore and enjoy time and time again at this wonderful museum.

CAMILLE SOBRIAN FINLAY
Camille Sobrian Finlay is a writer living in Halifax

Your lead, cast bronze, and old pewter heirlooms may not be as safely stored as you think.

Safely Stored?

THE LATE IONE GEDYE, FORMER head of conservation at the Institute of Archaeology, University of London, used to tell a story that her students would never forget. After many years on display in the British Museum, lead objects in one case began rapidly and mysteriously to corrode into lead carbonate. No one could pinpoint the source of organic acid vapour that would instigate such corrosion. Then one day a curator happened to pass by the affected case just as a security guard seated next to it was eating his lunch of fish and chips. Sure enough, the vinegar (acetic acid) on his chips proved to be the agent of destruction. This story highlights the sensitivity of lead to organic acid. Just a few parts per million of acidic vapour wafting into a leaky case was enough to cause extensive corrosion.

Lead, cast bronze, old pewter—if you think that your prized heirloom made from one of those materials is safely stored away in its box, think again. The Napoleonic lead presentation medals pictured above were stored in their custom-made display box. Unfortunately, the box was made with material corrosive to lead, in this instance a cardboard foundation that supported the leather covering.

Acetic, formic, and other organic acids are particularly corrosive to lead, which upon contact transforms lead into a white powder resembling talcum. The effects are irreversible, as well as toxic to humans.

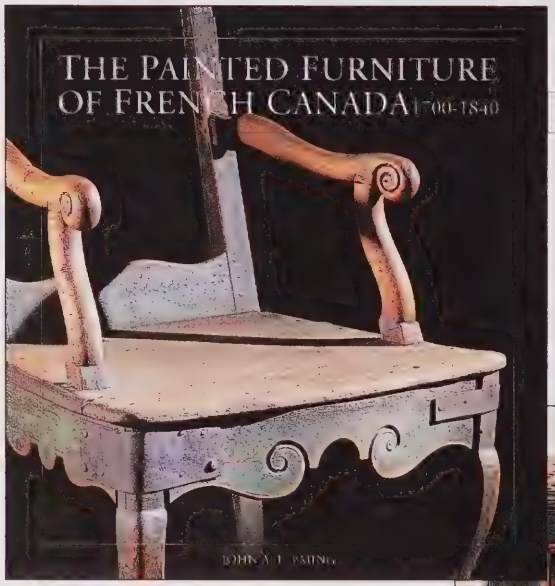
Certain woods, especially oak, also emit large quantities of vaporised organic acids and should be avoided when displaying or storing lead or lead-containing items such as cast bronze and old pewter. Modern building materials—plywood, particleboard, and the newly available MDF (medium density fibreboard), for instance—are equally hazardous to lead-bearing artifacts: the formaldehyde-based adhesives and binders deteriorate to give off organic acid vapours. Varnishes, such as urethanes, and other finishes are also a possible source of contamination.

Lead is not the only substance that is sensitive to organic acids. Shells, fossils, pearls, paper, and textiles are just some of the materials that may be adversely affected. The Conservation Department of the ROM has an ongoing testing program to identify potentially harmful products. The information gathered is used to advise designers and curatorial departments on safe materials for display cases and storage cabinets.

SUSAN STOCK AND HELEN COXON
Susan Stock and Helen Coxon are conservators at the Royal Ontario Museum

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN BOYLE

Books



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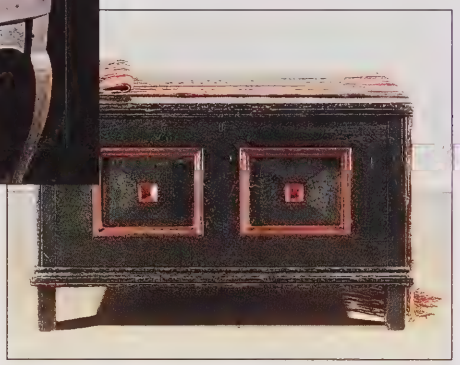

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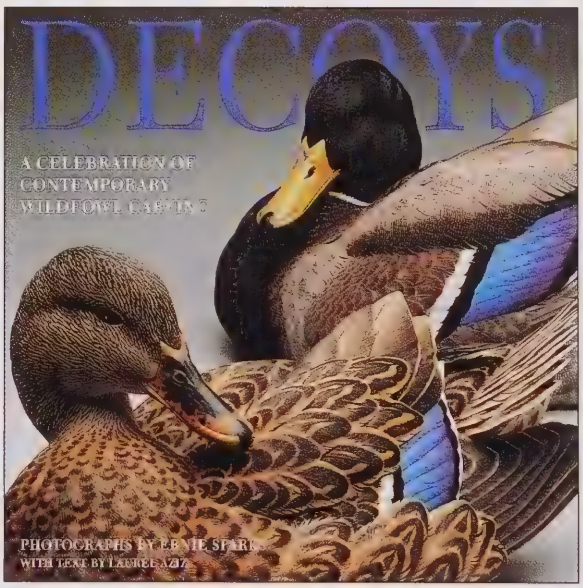

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Niagara Falls, Architecture, Canadian Women's Fashion, Treasures, and more...

In 1861, Archbishop John Lynch of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto petitioned Pope Pius IX for official recognition of Niagara Falls as a "pilgrim shrine." The Vatican agreed. And so Niagara Falls—historic and tacky old Niagara Falls, where the first horror "museum" opened in 1827—was granted "the same official status as Jerusalem or Rome," according to Patrick V. McGreevy's sometimes repetitious but always fascinating book, **Imagining Niagara: The Meaning and Making of Niagara Falls** (University of Massachusetts Press, US$25).

The literature of the Falls from both the Canadian and the American sides is of course vast. It has been accumulating steadily since 1678 when Fr Louis Hennepin became probably the first European to lay eyes on the great cataract. He gained this distinction while accompanying the explorer La Salle, who on an earlier trip had camped within a few kilometres of the Falls but had somehow missed them. Significantly, Fr Hennepin was not the first to *write* about the Falls, though it was a site he would describe very frequently through the years, his memory becoming more and more romantic with age.

Mass reader fascination with the subject continues yet. Witness two Niagara books by Pierre Berton in recent years. McGreevy, a geographer by trade, is, however, trying to do more than write an anecdotal history of Niagara, though he achieves this in the bargain. He is attempting instead to sort out the symbology of Niagara Falls and how it has changed through time.

What first attracted Europeans to the Falls was splendid ("sublime," in the language of the day) isolation. Until 1825, when the Erie Canal connected Buffalo with Albany, the Falls were still remote from nearly all large population centres. This only heightened the supposed spirituality at a time when Romanticism, with its insistence on the mystical power of nature, was the dominant mode of artistic expression. All the authors of what proved famous travel narratives paid mandatory visits, from Dickens to Anthony Trollope to Anna Jameson. Margaret Fuller, the pioneer feminist, was typical of her contemporaries when, in 1843, she went there "to woo the mighty meanings from the scene."

McGreevy tells much of his story through the use of literary works, both professional and amateur. In a more heavily illustrated book, he might have accomplished the task just as easily with old paintings and prints, for many visitors, given the cumulative expectations of the 19th century, felt bound to add their own impressions to the pile in one medium or another. Something about the place—by no means the largest or the most spectacular of waterfalls—attracted them. What it was, McGreevy believes, was death.

He writes: "If life was construed as a river that will ultimately plunge over a precipice, the brink of that precipice is the boundary line between life and death, a place where one could perhaps look beyond, if only in imagination." The metaphor of life construed as a river was central to Victorian literary and theological culture.

In her diary, Mrs. Simcoe, wife of Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe, records that eight of her husband's soldiers were swept to death over the Falls. Of course, suicides and daredevils have always held more appeal than mere accident victims and have been far more numerous. In fact, Niagara Falls has been the site of more suicides than any other place in North America, including the Golden Gate Bridge.

The first person to go over in a barrel and survive did so in 1901. The date is significant. During the last part of the 19th century, a carnival atmosphere had replaced the spiritual and occult associations of the Falls. Unchecked development had turned the natural wonder into a kind of natural theme park in the middle of a heavily populated industrial area. King C. Gillette, the socialist millionaire and inventor of the safety razor, was inspired to dream of putting up a utopian high-rise city-of-the-future there. By 1885, New York State had to step in to preserve the actual Falls themselves; Ontario followed with similar legislation two years later. At that time, Niagara Falls was already becoming the honeymoon capital it was to be for so long. By the turn of the century, the raw energy of the Falls had been harnessed for hydroelectric power (Buffalo was the first city to install turbines at the Falls). The Canadian side followed closely behind, which is how such men as Sir Henry Pellatt, the builder of Casa Loma in Toronto, made their fortunes, that is until Queen's Park began nationalizing the various grids to create what is now Ontario Hydro.

In short, Niagara Falls has been "a place of transformation, a kind of portal between this world and some mysterious other one: the exotically remote, the afterlife, nature, or the future." Finally, though, it became a simple tourist attraction and a rather well worn one at that: a very different matter from being the holy shrine that Archbishop

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Lynch foresaw. Perhaps Niagara Falls entered its present era when Oscar Wilde (in a wisecrack not quoted by McGreevy) remarked that the subject would be interesting only if the water travelled in the other direction.

TURNING FROM NATURAL TO MAN-made wonders, I am surprised to learn from Edward Robbins' book **Why Architects Draw** (MIT Press, US$39.95) that even today most architects, even young ones, work initially in sketchbooks rather than at computer terminals. To return to the source of their thinking, it seems, is to get back to the idea of architecture as both art and engineering. Robbins interviews nearly a dozen leading international architects about the role of the pencil in the process, and reproduces scores of their drawings —from scribbles to formal perspectives—using a strong spiral binding to make a landscape-format book that can be opened flat for close study.

In **Architects House Themselves** (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, $55.95), Michael Webb looks at the process of architectural creation from a different angle by examining nearly 50 residences that North American architects have built for themselves. He includes the obvious and famous examples, such as the Walter Gropius house in Massachusetts and Frank Lloyd Wright's place in Arizona, but is most useful when dealing with living architects whom he can interview about their own environments. He includes one Canadian, Donald McKay of Toronto, whose 595.2-square-metre (6400-square-foot) Rosedale home, completed in 1992, "offers a snug retreat from harsh winters. The frame extends out to support lightweight glass and aluminum curtain walls that wrap around three sides of the core like a high-tech porch screen, enclosing airy, sun-filled volumes and extending the house into the landscape."

Ludwig Wittgenstein, Architect by Paul Wijdeveld (MIT Press, US$75) is an exhaustive biography of a famous Viennese house (now the Bulgarian Cultural Institute) that Wittgenstein created for his sister, a wealthy arts patron, in the late 1920s. Wittgenstein was a linguistic philosopher with no formal architectural training whatever, but he had strong views on design. Seldom has a book gone so deeply into what the previous two titles also attempt to show: the actual cognitive processes that we take for granted but are so necessary for any piece of architecture to be arresting or original.

These books can all be read in tandem with Stewart Brand's study **How Buildings Learn: What Happens after They're Built** (Penguin, $37.50). Bolstering his text with hundreds of new and archival photos, Brand (the founder of the *Whole Earth Catalog*) shows that there is a crucial chronological window during which some old buildings are marked for survival and others for destruction—or, as he puts it, by which some remain only space while others occupy time. His theories can almost be reduced to a series of formulas, taking in such factors as the business cycle, entrepreneurship, the tax codes, and mere fashion. A fine book, full of cheeky ideas.

SOME OTHER NEW RELEASES OF INTEREST TO *Rotunda* READERS:

• **In Style: 100 Years of Canadian Women's Fashion** by Caroline Routh (Stoddart, $26.95 paper), a decade-by-decade review of how Canadian women have dressed, is also perforce a running chronicle of the Canadian garment trade and of Canadian designers, their chroniclers and critics. By drawing deeply and widely on social history, the author tries to learn to what degree Canadian women dressed differently from either British or American ones. To the extent that they did so, their preferences were the result of many cultural factors: some as obvious as the dominance of the Eaton's catalogue, others more complex, rarefied, and hypothetical. This is an entertaining and in-

formative survey, with hundreds of black-and-white illustrations, including designers' sketches and campy old advertisements.

• Readers interested in the above text might also enjoy **Kimono: Fashioning Culture** (Yale University Press, US$30) by Liza Crihfield Dalby, an American resident in Japan. In fact, the author is so fully integrated into the host culture that she can write at length, and with what seems amazing understanding, of the history of the once ubiquitous garment, which men abandoned long ago for western business dress and women retain only for special occasions, particularly ones marking birth, death, and educational achievement. The illustrations, though numerous, are all black-and-white; but the tidbits of fact and anecdote form a bright pattern of their own.

• **America's Ancient Treasures**, edited by Franklin and Mary Elting Folsom (University of New Mexico Press, US$37.50 cloth, US$19.95 paper) is a revised and expanded edition of a classic work of reference dealing with historical and archaeological sites, with particular attention to aboriginal ones ancient and modern, directed at the serious amateur rather than the casual tourist. It's one of the few such American books that includes thorough and detailed data on Canada as well. Perhaps they should have revised the title too.

• **Ways of the Wild: A Practical Guide to the Outdoors** by Kevin Callan (Broadview Press, $19.95 paper) is a handy Canadian guide to camping, canoeing, and backpacking, with special reference to making do. There are lists of what foods to buy at the supermarket. There's a short course in map-reading and another in paddling. Most people think they possess all this knowledge through some sort of cultural or genetic inheritance. Such a dangerous fallacy makes Callan's well-illustrated, pocket-sized book highly useful and, for some people, downright necessary.

• I first met R. D. Lawrence 25 years ago on a CBC Radio program. He was earning a living as the editor of a community newspaper and was promoting a book he had written on the outdoors. Now, of course, Lawrence is a much-revered Canadian naturalist and environmentalist who makes his home in the Haliburton region. Known especially for his study of wolves, he is a popular writer in Canada, but in the United States he is more of a cult hero. **The Green Trees Beyond: A Memoir** (Stoddart, $24.95) recounts his career but also fills in the story before he came to Canada from Britain. Lawrence, who was born in Spain, fought in the Spanish Civil War when he was only 14 years of age. Later, in the Second World War, he was a British tank commander during the Normandy invasion. One comes to the conclusion that the chaos of the modern world drove him ever deeper into the natural order where destruction is part of a cycle, not the outcome of politics.

• One of the lessons many of us learned from the late Joseph Campbell is the way that myths and stories persist deep within the collective imagination of a people, and how they are passed along with surprisingly few alterations to subsequent generations. **The Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe** by Hilda Ellis Davidson (Routledge, $74.95 cloth but only $21.50 paper) uses traditional tales combined with archaeological research to show the extent to which early Scandinavian peoples helped to shape Christian culture—and also the extent beyond which it's impossible to make such connections. In **Isis and Osiris, Exploring the Goddess Myth** (Doubleday, $29.95), Jonathan Cott, an insightful student of the inner workings of popular culture, traces this ancient Egyptian tale through time to Walt Whitman, D. H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer, and Bob Dylan.

DOUGLAS FETHERLING
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A Regional Original

JUST WHEN YOU THINK THAT ALL OF THE WORLD'S MAMMALS HAVE BEEN identified, look again. This lovely little marsupial, found during a ROM expedition to Guyana, South America, may represent a new species of common opossum. Although similar in many respects to other opossums of the area, she differs in size, hair pattern, colour, and behaviour—she is more shy and retiring. This unusual animal could help to reveal the factors that affected the evolution of lowland forest in the region. Using this and other data collected during the Mammalogy Department's ongoing survey of mammals in the country, conservationists will set priorities for conservation methods that will preserve Guyana's biodiversity. The opossum currently resides in Toronto where her behaviour and genes are being researched to confirm her unique status.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BROCK FENTON

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